

How the British divided Punjab into Hindu and Sikh

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During a 2012 visit to Naina Devi Temple in Himachal Pradesh, about an hour's drive from Anandpur Sahib, I wondered why so many Sikhs come to the temple for darshan. The answer lies in the events of 1699.

In the *Chandi Charitra*, the tenth Guru says that in the past god had deputed Goddess Durga to destroy evil doers. That duty was now assigned to him hence he wanted her blessings. So he invited Pandit Kesho from Kashi to conduct the ceremony at the hill of Naina Devi. The ceremony started on Durga Ashtami day, in the autumn of October 1698, and lasted for six months. At the end of this period, the sacred spring Navratras began on 21 March 1699.

Then, "When all the ghee and incense had been burnt and the goddess had yet not appeared, the Guru came forward with a naked sword and, flashing it before the assembly declared: 'This is the goddess of power!' This took place on 28 March 1699, the Durga Ashtami day. The congregation was then asked to move to Anandpur, where on New Year Day of 1st Baisakh, 1699, the Guru would create a new nation."³

On 30 March 1699, at Anandpur, Govind Singhji gave a stirring speech to the assembly about the need to protect their spiritual and temporal rights. He then asked if anyone would offer his head in the services of God, Truth and Religion. The five who came forward were Dayaram a Khatri from Lahore, Dharamdas a Jat from Hastinapur near Delhi, Sahib Chand a barber from Bidar in Karnataka, Himmat Chand Kahar, a water carrier from Puri in Odisha and Mohkam Chand Chihimba from Dwarka in Gujarat.

They were designated the Five "Beloved Ones" and termed "Khalsa" (ie Purified). "In India 'five' has been a sacred number from time immemorial. *Panchon mein Parmeshwar hai* is an old saying indicating the presence of Divinity in five, as are as the five elements of nature.

"Each of the five letters in the Persian word Khalsa has a significance. The first two, *kh* and *a*, stand, respectively for *Khud* or oneself and the *Akal Purakh* (God). 'L' signifies *Labbaik* meaning the following questions of God: "What do you want with me? Here am I. What would you have? and the reply of the *Singh* (devotee): Lord, give us liberty and sovereignty. 'S' signifies *Sahib* (Lord or Master). The last letter is written as *a* or, more usually, *h*. The former signifies *Azadi* and the latter refers to *Huma*, a legendary bird."⁴

Dr Satish K. Kapoor, distinguished educationist, historian and spiritualist wrote, "The word khalsa, meaning pure, unstained or undefiled derives from khalis or khalisah of the Arabic lexicon, and is used once in the Granth Sahib (Rag Sorath, word of Bhagat Kabir ji, page 655)."⁵

According to Khalsa tradition, its followers had to sport the five Ks i.e. Kesh (long hair), Kangha (comb), Kirpan (sword), Kara (steel bracelet), Kachcha (knickers). Long hair and turbans were supposed to protect the face and head from sword cuts and lathi blows. The kara was a reminder that the Sikh spirit was strong and unbending. The kachcha was more suitable for fighting the Mughals in than the dhotis and loose trousers of the Muslims. The kara was

also useful in hand to hand fights and “guarded the vulnerable portion of the right hand which wielded the kripaṇ”.⁶ According to a devout Sikh lady, other reasons for the five k's “was the need to look ferocious like Mughal soldiers. Nobody could run away from the battlefield as they could be immediately identified and soldiers were always ready for battle.”

Initially, the Khalsa followers were mostly Jats. Though others considered themselves Sikhs, they held back since they were not followers of the Khalsa. According to Sikh scholar W.H. McLeod, “Those who take initiation into Khalsa, having received the amrit or water of baptism are Amritdhari Sikhs. For those who held back the name adopted was that of Sahajdhari Sikhs. Those who do not take initiation but who observe the fundamentals of Rahit (particularly the uncut hair) are Kesdhari Sikhs.”⁷

The birth of the Khalsa resulted in the rise of Jat power in Punjab. Khalsa was raised to fight Mughal oppression and persecution of Hindus and Sikhs (who then were considered part of the larger Hindu community). The word “Sikh” comes from the “Sanskrit word *śishya* meaning a learner or a person who takes spiritual lessons from a teacher.”⁸

The birth of an aggressive community so close to them made the hill chiefs, particularly Raja Bhim Chand of Bilaspur uneasy. Together, they were apprehensive that a Guru king, who treated all subjects equally, was a threat to a feudal raja steeped in caste hierarchy. Their fear was that their subjects would find Guru Govind Singhji's policies more attractive and shift their support to him. Something had to be done or they would incur the wrath of the Mughal king too. The hill chiefs successfully got the Guru to move out of Anandpur to a small village near Kiratpur. However, when the raja tried to ambush his forces he was defeated.

The chiefs realized the Guru was too strong for them so they requested Aurangzeb for help. The Mughal ruler ordered the subedars of Sirhind and Lahore to help the raja destroy the Khalsa. Together they laid a siege on Anandpur where Govind Singh lived. Unable to face the combined onslaught, Govind Singh evacuated the fort entrusting his mother, wife and two sons to a Brahmin servant Gangu Kaul. It is because this servant made their whereabouts known to the Mughals that the Sikhs are upset with the Hindus.

Yet, Hindus also suffered alongside the Sikhs in their struggle. Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dyal Das sacrificed their lives along with Guru Tegh Bahadur, and were Brahmins. Note that, “When Guru Tegh Bahadur was prevented from entering Hari Mandir by his Sodhi cousins, he was invited by the Himachal kings to establish Anandpur Sahib in the Punjab hills,” says a scholar from Punjab.

Therefore, Sikhs hold it against Hindu king of Bilaspur for joining hands with the Mughals to defeat the tenth Guru. Similarly, Sikhs hold it against Bundela ruler Chhatrasal, who took part in the siege and capture of bairagi turned military commander Banda Bahadur.

The point is, it was not a Hindu-Sikh issue, for rulers routinely switched sides in those days. Note that Ratan Rai, the son of Raja Ram Rai of Assam, visited Anandpur with his mother and ministers, and presented several gifts to Guru Govind Singhji, including an elephant called Prasadi (or Parsadi).

However, if the Sikh argument is accepted, then Hindus should also be upset with the Sikhs when Sikh princes supported the British during the 1857 Mutiny.

To read about ten Hindus whom the Sikhs consider were against them <http://malicethoughts.blogspot.in/2015/10/hindu-sikh-relationship.html>

Fast forward to 1860's

Having experienced the strength of Sikh opposition during the Anglo-Sikh wars and grateful for the assistance received from Sikh princes during the Mutiny of 1857, the British realized that Sikhs would be an effective buffer between Afghanistan and India.

Therefore, the British reduced the number of Bengali soldiers (many of whom were involved in the 1857 Mutiny) and replaced them with loyal Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims. It however, insisted that only Kesadhari Sikhs could join the army i.e. those who sported the five k's. The enlistment of Sikhs increased steeply. Since it was mainly Jat Sikhs who sported the five k's then, they were the biggest beneficiaries since soldiers were well paid, given agricultural land and pension.

In order to woo the Jats, "The area specifically chosen for the Sikhs was a tract known as *nili bar*, irrigated the Chenab canal. Colonization officers scoured Sikh villages in the districts of Amrtisar, Ludhiana and Ferozpur to pick up the best farmers. The settlers were given heritable and inalienable rights of occupancy. The vast majority of Sikh colonists were Malwa Jats with a sprinkling on non-Jat agricultural tribes." ⁹ With time farmers prospered. Since these lands were given predominantly to Sikhs it resulted in gains for them. "Thus there was a phenomenal rise in the Sikh population in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century."¹⁰ The British also helped by reserving posts for Sikhs, especially for Kesadhari Khalsa, in the army and in civilian services.

Table 1 - Population of Punjab

Nos	Year	Actual nos of Sikhs in Lakhs	% increase
1	1881	17.06	-
2	1891	18.49	8.4
3	1901	21.02	13.7
4	1911	28.84	37.1
5	1921	31.10	7.8

Per Punjab Census Report, 1921.¹¹

Veena Talwar, author of *Dowry Murder, the Imperial Origins of a Culture Crime* wrote, "To prevent the kind of mutiny they had experienced from sepoys in 1857, the British organized religiously segregated regimental units from the alleged 'martial races', Sikhs, Pathans, Rajputs and Gurkhas. This severely restricted Hindus of other castes who wanted to join the army, particularly Khatri, who had served in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forces. It is important to mention that Hindus, particularly Khatri, who were acknowledged as Kshatriyas but were arbitrarily lumped together with the 'trading castes' in the British census reports (since large number of them were educated and engaged in trade), were seldom accepted into the British military service. The Khatri, who had also been landholders, acquired further acreage till the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 forbade them to do so as a 'non-agricultural' tribe. **Many families got around this artificially imposed caste barrier by raising one or more son as a Sikh, chiefly by having them adopt the name Singh and grow hair/beard to match.**

“The British enforced rigid occupational boundaries by creating ‘traditional agriculturists’, ‘martial races’ and ‘trading castes’. They could not trust the educated Khatri to be as obedient a soldier as the Jat, and certainly missed the rationale for the many male children being produced in these families.”¹² Note that Ranjit Singh's commander-in-chief who led the victory of Attock in 1813, Dewan Mohkam Chand and all Sikh Gurus were Khatri.

However, not all male Hindu children who were made Sikhs joined the army. When a Hindu couple did not have a son or their progeny did not survive, they made a Sukhna—a sort of benedictory prayer that the first child would be made a Sikh. This custom was alive and being followed even into the twentieth century. Sometimes, the Sants of Sikh sub sects like Udasis and Nirmalas would ask that a son be dedicated to the Sikh cause, if the number of issues in a family were many.

This explains why the British wooed Jat Sikhs, gave them predominance in the army, the rivalry between them and the Khatri and why Hindus (mainly Khatri) made the first son a Sikh. At the time there were turbaned and non-turbaned followers of Gurus. But those who partook in amrit and came forward to protect society, crystallised into a separate class, and gradually came to dominate. The Tat Khalsa opposed Bandai Sikhs (ie followers of Banda Bahadur, successor of Govind Singhji). According to Sikh scholar W. H. McLeod, “Tat Khalsa means 'Pure Khalsa'. Originally the name given to a section of the Panth (q.v.) which opposed the Sikh leader Banda in the early 18th century. Since the late 19th century, the name describes the radical group within the Singh Sabha (q.v.) which pressed to have its exclusivist interpretation of the Sikh faith accepted by the Panth (q.v.). Within the Singh Sabha it was opposed by the conservative Sanatan Sikhs (q.v.), who believed that Sikhs was merely one of the many varieties of Hindu tradition.”¹³ More about Singh Sabhas later.

“Sometimes Jats resent that Khatri deprived them of the Guru gaddi. Baba Buddha, a Jat, was made to do tilak of gurus but was never assigned the supreme religious position,” says a scholar from Punjab. Jat differences with Bhatras (Khatri-Arora Sikhs) also arise because Jats see themselves as the original followers of Khalsa and Bhatras as later entrants.

There have been attempts to undermine the bravery of Khatri and play up the bravery of Sikhs (Jats). Besides Dewan Mohkam Chand, another brave Khatri in Ranjit Singh's team was Mirr Dewan Chand. After capturing the forts of Multan and Shujabad in 1818, he was honoured with the title of *Zafar Jang Bahadur* (victorious in battle). They are hardly spoken about but another able warrior Hari Singh Nalwa is remembered. (The name Nalwa, or Nalua was given to Hari Singh when he tore off the head of a lion). Similarly Hindu courtiers of Ranjit Singh like Bhawani Das (finance minister), Dina Nath (financial advisor) and others have not won accolades in public.

An attempt is also made to show some well known North Indian warriors as Sikhs. A Google search for Banda Bahadur shows this Rajput or Bhardwaj Brahmin as a Sikh and is ironically now addressed as Banda Singh Bahadur. He was born Lachman Dev/Das and was a Bairagi sadhu when he met Guru Govind Singhji. Similarly Zorawar Singh, a brave Rajput, who served Raja Gulab Singh and made Ladakh and parts of Tibet part of Jammu and Kashmir, is considered by many as a Sikh.

While nowadays, wearing a turban and having long hair leads to the assumption that the person is a Sikh, once upon a time this was a common feature in society. There was nothing sectarian about wearing a turban. It was more for the safety of head, and also a social

tradition. With the passage of time, the custom was abridged. The pagri came to be used only on important occasions like marriage, death etc. It is not something that began due to being part of the panch kakars (five external symbols) of the tenth Guru. One of Shiva's names is Ushneesha, one who wears a turban.

To retain effective control over Punjab, the British accentuated the wedge between land-owning Jats and non-agriculturists. The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 “enabled the government to retain its inflexible revenue policies and continue to blame peasant proprietors’ misfortunes on Hindu moneylenders. It was done to pacify the land owning classes and deflect a rebellion, and to aggravate and exploit any tension that existed between Hindus and Muslims to keep their political grip on Punjab. This piece of legislation created a favoured, ‘dominant’ agriculturalist class at the expense of other social groups. Here the ‘agriculturists’ were Muslim tribes and Sikh and Hindu Jat zamindars, and the ‘non-agriculturists’ were Hindu Brahmins, Khattris and Banias. The Act made tribe and caste the basis of land ownership.”¹⁴ The British played up differences between Hindus and Muslims and sought to make Muslim and Sikh Jats loyal subjects, thus safeguarding their own position in Punjab.

Some also credit the Arya Samaj, a reformist movement started by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, for increasing the Hindu-Sikh divide. The Arya Samajis felt that Sikhs were really Hindus and they should be won back to their original faith. Their contention was backed by the social customs of the time. Note that many Sikhs were initially followers of Swami Dayananda and members of Arya Samaj.

Conversions and remarks against Sikh Gurus by some Arya Samaj leaders did not endear them to the Sikhs. The Arya Samaj was actually more focused on reconverting Muslims. One of the leading lights of the Shuddhi Movement, Swami Shraddhananda, was murdered by Abdul Rashid in 1926.

Some Sikhs also held it against the Arya Samaj for promoting Hindi at the expense of Gurumukhi. However, with the establishment of British rule over Punjab, Urdu became a dominant language of education and administration. What the Arya Samaj wanted was to replace Urdu with Hindi. Under its influence, Hindi was adopted as a language of administration in Rajputana and Uttar Pradesh. (Read article *History of Urdu*, link at end of essay.)

Some even credit the formation of Singh Sabhas to Hindus, and the Arya Samaj in particular.

However, even before the Arya Samaj was founded **the first Singh Sabha was founded in 1873**. Author W.H. Mcleod wrote, “to restore the credibility of the Sikhs following Kuki disturbances and also to stem what seemed to be a clear signs of decay in the Panth. The readiness of many Sikhs to indiscriminately adopt Hindu lifestyles was one cause of increasing dismay. Christian missions also seemed to be a threat, and in 1873 the decision of four pupils of the Amritsar Mission School to accept Christian baptism prompted the foundation of the Singh Sabha in that city. Another branch was formed in Lahore in 1879 with strong emphasis on the recovery of distinctive Sikh values. Two distinctive trends soon emerged, with what have been termed as the Sanatan Sikhs prominent in Amritsar and the Tat Khalsa dominant in Lahore.”¹⁵

Khushwant Singh wrote, “Four years before the setting up of the Arya Samaj, the Sikh gentry of Amritsar had convened meetings to protest against the speeches of a Hindu orator who made scurrilous remarks against the Sikh gurus. These meetings had been organised by a society which described itself as the Singh Sabha. It had the support of the rich, landed gentry and orthodox. The society's objects included the revival of the teachings of the gurus, production of religious literature in Punjabi and a campaign against illiteracy. The founders also sought to interest high placed Englishmen in, and assure their association with, the educational program of the Singh Sabha. **To ensure patronage of the government the Sabha resolved to cultivate loyalty to the crown.**”¹⁶

As a follower of many Rishis and Gurus, for whom words of praise and criticism are equally showered, it baffles me why people take offence against every word of criticism. If a follower has innate faith in the Guru and their teachings, use the power of the intellect to respond to criticism instead of taking offense.

Further Man Singh, president of the Golden Temple Committee in a message of farewell to Lord Ripon wrote, “Our bodies are the exclusive possession of the British. Moreover, that we are solemnly and religiously bound to serve Her Majesty, that in discharging this duty we act according to the wishes of our Great Guru, although living far away from Her Majesty's feet and that we regard the people of England as-our kind brethren.” *Tribune*, 15 November 1989¹⁷

Thus, is it correct to blame mainly the Arya Samaj for increasing the Hindu-Sikh divide then? This report of 23 October 1890 in *Tribune* is proof of the British role in promoting Sikh separatism. At a function in Patiala, Lord Lansdowne said, “With this Singh Sabha movement the Government of India is in hearty sympathy. We appreciate the many qualities of the Sikh nation.”¹⁸

In the field of education, too, there was competition between Singh Sabha and Arya Samaj. After the Samaj opened the DAV (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College) in Lahore in 1886, “a hukumnama was issued from the Golden Temple asking Sikhs to give a tenth of their income towards building of Khalsa College, Amritsar, whose foundation was laid in 1892.”¹⁹

The Arya Samaj was primarily concerned about the inroads made by Christianity and Islam into Hinduism. In fact it was to counter missionary activity that its founder, a Gujarati, went to Punjab. Its areas of focus were social service and spread of English education. (Read article *Arya Samaj and the DAV Movement - Educational and Social Dimensions* link end of essay.)

Besides the Arya Samajis, Punjabi Hindu society then also consisted of Sanatani Hindus. Did they also criticize the Sikh Gurus?

A scholar sums up the arguments of Pandit Sukh Lal and replies, “Yes Sanatanis did. Pandit Sukh Ram Pathak, for example, openly challenged Sikh beliefs. He said in the Anand Karaj (approved order of Sikh marriage) the couple could be brother-sister, not husband-wife; that all Sikh gurus had *yajnopavita* (sacred thread) and other sanskaras by Hindu ways, that only Hindu priests were entitled to dana-dakshina. It was the period not of dialogue but of disputation. But the Arya Samajis were more into it.”²⁰

A move to say Sikhs were not Hindus also received an impetus in 1898 with Kahan Singh Nabha's book *Ham Hindu Nahin Hain*, the passing of the Anand Marriage Act in 1909 which laid down a specific order for Sikhs and the British insistence that all recruits to the army from the community wore the five k's.

Note that the book *Ham Hindu Nahin Hai* was a vitriolic appraisal of Hinduism, focussing on why Sikhs were not Hindus. This was in response to the over enthusiasm of some Arya Samajis who publicly converted Sikhs into Aryas and cut their hair. Importantly, the key difference was that Arya Samajis were critics of the Raj while Sabhaites "cultivated loyalty to the crown."²¹

According to W. H. Mcleod, author of *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, "**Anand Karaj was not performed until the middle of the 19th century** although it is certain that at least the Anand Sahib (q.v.) portion was well established for a long time before that. The marriage ceremony was, however, essentially a Hindu one performed around a sacred fire. The introduction of Anand Karaj was a major concern of the Singh Sabha, an emphatic demonstration that Sikhs were not Hindus."

One of the essentials of the Tat Khalsa movement was the denial of any association with Hinduism for e.g. as W.H. McLeod wrote, "For the Sikhs of the 18th century, the goddess Devi clearly had a considerable fascination. The goddess Durga who appears in three works in the Dasam Granth created a problem for the Tat Khalsa scholars who strongly affirmed monotheism. The question was settled by concluding that Bhagauti symbolises God as the Divine Sword."²²

As stated earlier, Sanatan Sikhs were prominent in Amritsar and Tat Khalsa dominant in the Lahore Singh Sabha. A superficial unity between the two was achieved in 1902 when Chief Khalsa Diwan was formed. The differences between the two Sabhas also arose because one regarded the Panth as a special form of Hindu tradition whilst the other believed Sikhism was a different religion. According to W.H. Mcleod, "The Tat Khalsa progressively assumed complete dominance of Sikh affairs, introducing newly fashioned rituals, stressing Khalsa forms, and reinterpreting history."²³

The Tat Khalsa emerged victorious when "**in 1905 Hindu idols were removed from the Harimandir**".²⁴ According to a respected scholar, "Sikhs and Hindus were always one and would go to Shivalas and Gurudwaras together. Now a schism has arisen unfortunately, and Hindu deities are not considered worthy of worship by orthodox Sikhs." A Sikh friend adds, "I have seen quite a few traditional Sikh homes where apart from the Guru Granth Sahib, shrines of Hindu deities like Devi, Shiva, Ganesha, Rama and Krishna coexist 'discreetly'."

It is a well known fact that the plan to construct **Durgiana Mandir**, by the identity-conscious Sanatani Hindus, was primarily in response to the removal of sacred images from the Golden Temple. The idea to build the temple in Amritsar was that of Gur Shai Mal Kapoor. Its foundation stone was laid by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya in 1924 on Ganga Dashmi day. A visitor will see the striking similarity between the two temples.

In 1902, the first Sikh political organization, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, was founded. It was a coordinating body for the Singh Sabhas. Although the Singh Sabha movement died out in the 1920's, it awakened the Sikhs. They questioned why the job of a granthi (scripture reader) was done by members of the Udasi order (not followers of Khalsa) even though it was the

practice since the Mughal times. The Akalis took control of the gurudwaras after throwing out the mahants. The Udasis had been the keepers of gurudwaras when the community was in turmoil due to invasions. To be fair, there were allegations of misuse of funds and their leading immoral lives.

The truth lies somewhere in between, perhaps some Udasis were immoral. Importantly, they did not follow Khalsa, believed in idol worship and the followers of Tat Khalsa wanted control of the gurudwaras.

But who are Udasis?

The Udasi sect is traced to the four sons of Brahma. Historically, it began with Baba Siri Chand (son of Guru Nanak Dev and Mata Sulakhani Devi). Udasis are known for their renunciatory outlook as against the mainstream Sikh belief in worldly activity. Udasi establishments do not fall under the control of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

Author and Kriya Yoga teacher Jyoti Subramanian adds, “It is now popularly believed that the Udasi sect was started by Yogi Siri Chand. The fact is that the Udasis were an old sect connected with the even more ancient Nath Samradaya. The *dhuni* or *dhuna* (traditional fire pit with a tong) is a hallmark of the Naths, followers of the Gorakhnath lineage. The practice of the Udasis are also yogic, involving pranayam, bandhas etc. I remember reading that Nanak himself sent his son to the Udasis to undergo training. Also, Nanak travels are referred as Udasis. Surprisingly, Siri Chand handed over his seat to Guruditta, son of Guru Hargobind Singhji who had laid his son at the feet of Yogi Siri Chand. Guruditta was a householder and not a renunciate.”

Dr Satish K. Kapoor wrote in *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, “Sri Chand’s god was both ‘saguna’ (with attributes) and ‘nirguna’ (without attributes). He synthesised ‘jnana marg’ (way of knowledge) and ‘bhakti marg’, the idea of one god and of His divine descent on the earth in various forms, and of ‘dev puja’ and ‘guru puja’. He believed both in the ultimate oneness of everything and in one’s cherished and chosen deity (‘ishta devata’). While, on one hand, he tried to bring about a rapprochement between Hindus and Muslims and stemmed the tide of converts to Islam, on the other, he popularised the ‘panchayatana puja’ of the ‘smarta’ brahminical tradition involving the simultaneous worship of the five deities Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti to dilute sectarian differences among the Hindus.”²⁵

Who are Nirmalas?

Dr Satish K. Kapoor wrote in *South Asian Observer*, Toronto, “While at Paonta Sahib (Himachal Pradesh) where he composed most of his writings, Guru Govind Singhji sent five of his disciples – Gandā Singh, Karam Singh, Vir Singh, Rām Singh and Saina Singh – investing them with the saffron attire of ascetics, to Kāshī (Vārāṇasī, Uttar Pradesh) in 1686, for learning Sanskrit and acquiring knowledge of classical Hindu texts. The chosen Sikhs studied under Pandita Satyānanda for about seven years and acquired the quintessentials of ancient Sanskrit literature. After returning to Ānandpur Sahib (Punjab), birthplace of the Khālsā, they were called Nirmalas, meaning pure and spotless. As directed by Guru Gobind Singh they imparted their learning to others, translated works from Sanskrit into Gurmukhi and set an example in righteous living. The Nirmalas keep long hair, flowing beard, and wore

turban but do not always undergo the Sikh baptismal rites of the orthodox. They consider Vedānta as most practical and sublime, and are sometime called Vedāntī Sikhs.”²⁶

A scholar adds, “Ironically, Udasis and Nirmalas (Sanatis) today have the Granth in their establishments which they worship in virtually the same way. But they do not exactly follow Sikh Rehat Maryada of SGPC. Udasi aarti is different from Sikh ardas. Karshni Udasis even worship Krishna. Both Udasis and Nirmalas are close to sadhus of Dashnami Sampradaya, attend Kumbh Mela, and are liberal. The key question then is when was the Rehat Maryada created, by whom and why. Here is where the schism solidified and where the British hand may be found!”

A famous Kathakar, Late Sant Singh Maskin, is called a Sanatani Sikh, but his interpretation is not always accepted by the Khalsa Sikhs. (A Kathakar is one who does *katha*, a sort of *satsang* based on Gurbani and the life of Sikh Gurus.)

The success of these protests against Udasis produced two institutions that dominate Punjab today—the SGPC and the Akali Dal. **SGPC was created to manage gurudwaras all over Punjab in 1925.** “The more radical elements organised a semi-military corps of volunteers known as the Akali Dal (army of immortals)”²⁷ to fight for SGPC causes. It became a political party later.

By virtue of its control over gurudwara affairs and revenue, SGPC became an important body whose control was key to Sikh politics. The Akalis took it over and are yet to relinquish control. Since then Akalis, SGPC and state politics are intertwined.

By about 1920, SGPC was overtaken by the Akali Dal, a political party that gave expression to the revived sense of Sikh identity. The Akalis entered into a dispute with the British for the control of Sikh gurudwaras. In 1925, the Sikh Gurudwaras Act was passed signalling their complete victory. The Act’s definition of a Sikh leant strongly towards the exclusivist Khalsa view and is “one who believed in the ten gurus and the Granth Sahib and was not a *patit* (apostate). This last proviso was particularly odious to the Hindu members of the Legislative Council.”²⁸

In the context of Sikhs a *patit* is one who does not follow Sikh Rehat Maryada. Trimming of the long hair, idol worship, smoking, following the rituals of other faiths, or not following Sikh religious injunctions makes one a patit.

Hindus, Buddhists and Jains are repeatedly blamed for being idol worshippers. But as is noted there were idols in Darbar Sahib till 1905 and various other old and new rituals including the importance of the five Ks persist and exist in Sikhism.

For every idol and ritual, the meaninglessness or meaningfulness is always in the mind of the beholder/performer. All cultures and societies have idols, icons, devices, traditions, rites and rituals that may or may not be tagged with religion or not explicitly identified to spirituality.

Dr Satish K. Kapoor wrote in, *Hinduism the Faith Eternal*, “The aesthetically-carved image pleases the eyes and enlivens the heart. Its sacredness penetrates the soul. The devotee begins with faith; faith is transformed into feeling; feeling into emotion; emotion into awareness and awareness into an undercurrent of consciousness beyond the form of the deity.”

With the birth of the Akali Dal, its leaders “saw it as their task to win rights and privileges for Sikhs which would safeguard their religion in independent India. This crisis of identity was also the sore from which Bhindranwale squeezed such hatred of Hinduism.”²⁹

The consequences of the above were many.

The birth of Akali Dal and its control over gurudwaras heralded the irrevocable tradition of mixing religion and politics in Punjab. It also made Jat Sikhs a powerful community. It started a tradition of Khatri/Aroras/Brahmins making the first son a Sikh. Children of the Sikh son became Sikh and so on. Today, future generations of the same family having similar surnames are known to the outside world as followers of two religions, Sikhism and Hinduism. It created a divide between Jat and Khatri/Arora Sikhs such that the latter are called “Bhapa”, a term used dismissively by Jats to describe some Khatri and others. It also resulted in non-Jat Sikh officers in the armed forces not revealing their actual surnames for fear of being ridiculed and making it 'Singh' instead. A Sikh colleague in the Rajpura factory, born Maninder Chawla, wrote his name as Maninder Singh Chawla—the extra Singh added to show he was a true Sikh. During a 2014 visit to Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, I met many Sikhs with surnames like Bali, Sudan that is indicative of their Brahmin origin.

Importantly, it laid the foundation for the division of Punjabis into Hindus and Sikhs. Earlier there were no iron clad walls between the two, but now who is a Sikh got codified.

A Punjabi shares personal insights, “Khatri and Aroras use the epithet of Singh or go without it. The former are now called Sikhs. The distinction continues in a different milieu, and the wedge is increasing. The tradition of making one male member of family a Sikh was popular till recently. In our family, my youngest uncle was ordained a Sikh nearly 76 years back. He got married into a Sikh family but his two sons have Hindu names and they do not wear a turban. My in-laws are non-turbaned Kohli, but my uncle is turbaned Malhotra.”

Due to this desire to show that they are separate and better that the story of Guru Nanak defeating Gorakhnath got traction, though it was an inconsequential debate for the spiritually inclined. According to Jyoti Subramanian, disciple of Yogiraj Siddhanath, “The most popular reference to the Nath yogis who were also known as the Siddh is in the *Siddha Goshti* in which, according to some, Nanak defeated Gorakhnath in a debate whilst according to others the debate was between Nanak and Bhagarnath, Charpatnath and Luharipaa. Even conservatively speaking the timeline for them is at least 400 years or more before Nanak. So the story of Guru Nanak defeating Gorakhnath is suspect or at best not clear. It was part of popular folklore of those times.” She adds that Gorakhnath is said to have also been defeated by Kabir, Allam Prabhu and others making Gorakhnath’s lifespan over 700 years.

In my own home I have seen how, throughout my childhood, a big picture of Guru Nanak was kept in our home temple along with a smaller one of Lakshmiji. Sometime in the 1980s Guru Nanak’s picture faded away from our memories. Post 2000, I tried to make amends by installing a picture of Guru Govind Singhji.

It is worth noting that:

- Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated gold for three temples of which two are called Hindu today. These temples are Hari Mandir, Amritsar, Kashi Vishwanath Mandir and Jawalamukhi in Himachal Pradesh.
- The verses of 22 Brahmins occurs in the Granth Sahib: Surdas, Beni, Parmananda, Trilochana, Jayadeva, Ramananda and 17 bhattas (bards).
- An ancient Shivalaya exists inside the Golden Temple complex.
- The Siachen War Memorial has a plaque which quotes Guru Govind Singhji and reads, “Oh Lord Shiva, grant me this boon that, I never shy away from doing good deeds. I should never be frightened away from fighting for Justice, Dharma and Rightful Cause and I should be determined to emerge victorious from this battle. Every soldier to have a pure heart and mind and let not greed come near him. When the time comes for my soul to unite with yours I should die fighting in the battle field.”
- The **Sikh Crown Prince Krishna Singh from the royal family of Patiala** (son of Maharaja Mangal Singh) would have become king if he had not taken sanyas. Instead his eldest step brother Maharaja Karam Singh became king. “After a life full of action and adventure, the prince took sannyas - the vows of a renunciate - in his fiftieth year. He entered the Udasi sect of sannyasin, assumed the monastic name of Vishnudas” and is now remembered as Tapaswiji. Born in 1770, he gave up his body in 1955. To know more read *Tapaswiji, A Biography* by T.S. Anantha Murthy.³⁰

To summarise, from the 1860's to 1930 the British created the Hindu-Sikh divide by stating that only those sporting five k's could join the army, and by supporting the Tat Khalsa Movement, passing the Land Alienation Act in 1900 and the Sikh Gurudwara Act in 1925. The latter's definition of a Sikh leant strongly towards the exclusivist Khalsa view. British policies made it economically beneficial to be declared a Sikh. It was a well thought through strategy to divide the people of Punjab.

Next chapter is titled 'Events Leading to Operation Blue Star' and covers the period 1947 to 1984.

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